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ABSTRACT

In 1996, Oklahoma's Tulsa Community College (TCC) participated in the American Association of Community Colleges' Exploring America's Communities project, which works to strengthen the teaching and learning of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. TCC's primary goals were to promote professional development, to develop and enhance curricula, and to raise the general institutional awareness of the issues surrounding American plurality and identity. The first priority was to involve faculty and staff in activities that encourage the incorporation of American pluralism and identity into the curriculum. Activities to meet this goal have included faculty and staff monthly meetings and parallel groups reviewing articles and books. The goal of enhancing the curricula has been met through the American Conversations study group, which compiled an annotated bibliography and made recommendations for collecting the appropriate materials. Additionally, a new American Humanities course is being expanded to a third campus. The third major goal, raising institutional awareness, was accomplished through a series of presentations about the project, a facilitated discussion on core American values, and discussions in classrooms and various groups. The team has decided not to have a capstone event because it would give the impression that TCC is finished exploring America's communities. (HAA)

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Tulsa Community College
Exploring America's Communities Progress Report

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In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book
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PROGRESS REPORT

EXPLORING AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES:

IN QUEST OF COMMON GROUND

December, 1996

Tulsa Community College (TCC), an urban, multi-campus, comprehensive community college, was established in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1969. It is the largest junior college in Oklahoma, serving students on four campuses. With an average age of approximately thirty years of age, over 65% of Tulsa County first time freshmen begin their college educations at Tulsa Community College. The college has over 22,000 credit enrollments each semester, offering university-parallel associate degrees as well as certificate and associate-degree technical and occupational programs. Additionally, over 4,000 non-credit students are enrolled in a variety of courses each semester. The minority population of the college closely mirrors that of the metropolitan Tulsa area, with 8% of the student body identifying themselves as African-American, 5% as Native American, 2% as Hispanic, 3% as Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 1% as other.

The primary goals of TCC's "Exploring America's Communities" action plan are to promote professional development, to develop and enhance curricula, and to

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raise the general institutional awareness of the issues surrounding American plurality and identity. The team's first priority has been to involve faculty and staff in a number of activities designed to encourage the incorporation of concepts of American pluralism and identity into the curriculum. The faculty is aware of the paucity of its background in the study of non-European cultures, both within and without the borders of the United States.

To overcome this lacuna, faculty and staff have been meeting monthly since February 1996 in informal, yet structured, reading and discussion groups. There have been parallel groups, which have some overlap of members. The largest of the groups, approximately twenty faculty and staff from various disciplines and service areas and from all campuses, has been meeting to discuss and review specific articles and books and to exchange annotated bibliographies of recommended multicultural resources. The project team take responsibility for meeting arrangements and notification, but members of the group take turns in being responsible for the leadership of the group. Another, smaller group of faculty and staff met bi-monthly throughout the summer and fall semester to read and discuss Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, as a baseline, outsider's look at American culture in the 1830's. At the recommendation of visiting scholar, Dr. Sharon Harley (University of Maryland), the college has purchased multiple copies of Ronald Takaki's *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* for the group to read and discuss during the spring semester.

The goal of enhancing and enriching the curricula has been accomplished by those participating in the American Conversations study group. They compiled an annotated bibliography and recommended that the college purchase books and multimedia resources for research and classroom use. The group has also discussed Service Learning, with discussion being led by faculty who have integrated Service Learning into their existing courses. We are confident that, with time, the concept of Service Learning will be shared more widely.

The new course, American Humanities, is being expanded to a third campus. Resources recommended by the American Conversations group and the project team will be purchased to enhance this course. Additionally, because of the popularity of the course, the team is exploring the possibility of an American Studies option.

The third major goal is to raise the general institutional awareness of American pluralism and identity. Upon returning from Los Angeles, the team made a series of presentation to raise awareness and foster enthusiasm for the project. The first presentation was to the President of the college, followed by a presentation to TCC's Board of Regents and administration. The Board listened attentively and asked questions of all three team members. In April, the team invited the Student Activities Directors from each of the campuses and the student leaders of various student organizations to an information and brainstorming session. The following week, the team met with the fifteen division chairs of the college to inform them of the content and scope of the project and to invite their

participation in "Exploring America's Communities." Additionally, TCC's student newspaper published an article about the college's participation in the AACC project.

The visits by Dr. Sharon Harley in August and the AACC mentor, Dr. Bob Sessions (Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, IA), in November were two of the most effective catalysts for awareness. In each case, the team arranged for a variety of presentations/discussions with a number of college constituencies, including students, faculty, staff, and administrators. In addition, Dr. Sessions spoke to the Tulsa Community College Board of Regents, giving an overview of the nationwide project and, specifically, TCC's project. He recommended to the administration and the Board that they help those involved with the project continue to build on the strong foundation already established.

A unique awareness technique employed by the team was a facilitated discussion on core American values. A facilitator led a self-selected group of faculty and administrators through a two-hour session to discover what consensus, if any, could be reached on America's core values. The same exercise was repeated with provosts and deans from other northeast Oklahoma colleges which belong to the Higher Education Cultural Roundtable. Both groups concluded that Americans value personal freedom, yet long for a sense of community. The tension appears to be over how America can maintain personal freedom while fostering community. Both groups argued that education is the solution to the ignorance that breeds fear and separateness in Americans.

The discussions in classrooms and in various groups have been relaxed and productive. There has been no apparent hostility or reticence in discussing issues of race, class, or gender. The positive atmosphere established by the multiple awareness activities and the unqualified support of the college administration has been important to the success of the many conversations that have taken place. The only obstacle faced by the team was the time constraints of those who wished to participate but were unable to do so.

The team has decided not to have a capstone event to the project because to do so would give the false impression that TCC is finished "Exploring America's Communities: In Quest of Common Ground." In fact, Tulsa Community College has just begun to address the issues of American pluralism and identity. The team expects that activities will persist and increase. The reading and discussion groups will continue to meet and students have indicated an interest in duplicating the project. The Higher Education Cultural Roundtable has taken "Democracy in America" as its program theme for the academic year and will sponsor two lectures and discussions, led by Clay Jenkinson (University of Nevada at Reno), based on Tocqueville's work with notes for the nineties. These programs will be open to students, faculty, staff, and the general public. Furthermore, the college recently received a grant from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development which will provide funding to establish Community Outreach Partnership Centers in low-income communities. Service learning is an integral part of the vision for these Centers.

The visibility and activities of these three projects will enhance the growing awareness of American pluralism and identity, and the institutional responsibility for that awareness. Additionally, the influence of "Exploring America's Communities: In Quest of Common Ground" will continue to diffuse throughout the curriculum and culture of Tulsa Community College.

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